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ON THE INVARIANCE OF STANDARD ENGLISH

> …our ability to vary our language according to our social and regional backgrounds, our professional careers, and indeed our creative urges as individuals, is at the very heart of the gift that human language bestows. (Randolph Quirk 1990: 15)

1. Introduction

The standard is generally taken to be a (written) variety of language that varies minimally in form and maximally in function. The stability of form of the standard is a result of the codification of its norms in dictionaries and grammar books. The question of how the standard arises has received two distinct explanations in twentieth-century linguistic theory. In most sociolinguistic accounts, the standard is taken to be a result of deliberate and conscious efforts undertaken as part of the language maintenance and planning policy by government agencies, inculcated through the educational system and disseminated by language authorities as well as (parts of) the media. The variety of language propagated through these institutions is "educated" language, which carries high social prestige and which may be synonymous with an elite variety of language. It is the only variety of language characterized by elaboration of function.

To the extent that the standard is associated with a system of beliefs about the stability of its linguistic norms and attitudes to usage that is or is not sanctioned by authority, it is an ideology. In a recent study, Trudgill (1999, 2011) takes a different view, arguing that standard language in fact arises in the process of a natural course of language evolution through historical time. As a result, its distinctive grammatical features are not free from idiosyncrasy and irregularity, similarly to what is observed in non-standard

varieties. However, it cannot be linked to other, non-standard varieties, "because the codification that forms a crucial part of the standardisation process results in a situation where, in most cases, a feature is either standard or it is not" (Trudgill 1999: 124).

Trudgill supports his stand with an analysis of Standard British English, characterizing it from a sociolinguistic perspective as a "purely social dialect" spoken natively by a small fraction of between 12 to 15 per cent of the population of Britain at the top of the social class scale.[1] Although mainstream modern sociolinguistic theory is founded on the assumption that language is essentially a social phenomenon and is impressed by the social reality of linguistic diversity, Trudgill still focuses the stability of form as a defining criterion by which Standard British English, one from a range of other varieties of English, should be characterized.

The aim of this study is to reflect on Trudgill's approach, in which in an effort to view standard language as a naturally evolved variety, the concept of standard language is consciously divorced from language ideology, very much as in the philosophically and methodologically different generative tradition of linguistic theorizing. Unlike in sociolinguistic theory, in generative theoretical linguistics language is not social, but individual in that what underpins the speakers' linguistic performance are their internal, individual rather than group, societal or community grammars. Building on Wilson and Henry (1998), the view taken here is that standard language is both individual and social, arising only in linguistically and socially stratified communities in which the standard plays a symbolic, nation-defining role. However, if it is characterized as an educated, elite variety, it cannot be divorced from language ideology, contrary to Trudgill's stand. While the distinctive grammatical features of the standard variety divorced from grammatical ideology may well characterize the grammars internal to individuals who acquire Standard English natively, only the grammars of young children may be claimed to be constructed largely or entirely free from external, socially-driven motivation.[2] In adolescence and adult life, social factors impinge on the representation of language in the minds of individual speakers both in terms of the linguistic features and in terms of the social variables that de-

[1] As Trudgill advances his view on Standard English in reference to British English, discussion will be limited to Standard British English. Differences in the ideology of Standard British and Standard American English, which do not have any direct bearing on this study, are discussed in L. Milroy (1999). The linguistic differences between the two regional varieties of Standard English are described in some detail in Trudgill and Hannah (2008).

[2] As Smith et al. (2013) argue, acquisition of social variables may be contemporaneous with acquisition of grammatical competence in young children.

cide on the choice of the variants that the grammar of the language makes available. Educated speakers in standard language cultures are conscious of standard norms and tend to use language in a manner that is closer to the socioculturally constructed idealized grammatical form of the language of their linguistic community at least in some situational contexts. However, for Standard English to be acquired and used natively, i.e. at home, it must have a full range of styles, including the most casual, whose grammatical features would be considered ungrammatical judged by the norms of the written standard (cf., among others, Carter and McCarthy 2006; Hudson and Holmes 1995). Standard English must also provide room for register variation, whose grammars contain grammatical features that would be ungrammatical in general Standard English (cf. Haegeman 2006), or they would be judged informal/colloquial (cf. Biber et al. 1999). Furthermore, as speakers of Standard English do not acquire and use language in socially homogeneous conditions, they may use features of non-standard English grammar in verbal interactions with non-standard English speakers in social interactions, as the study of Jerzy Freundlich in this volume shows (cf. also Labov 1972). This points to an inherent conflict between the claim of the invariance of Standard English and the assumption of its elaboration of function. Rather, the social reality of linguistic diversity calls for a distinction between the inherent ability of individual grammars to vary and actual production of variation in real-time social contexts of interactions, which may be supressed for purely social reasons. The standard, perhaps even more so than other varieties of language, provides evidence that language should be seen both as individual and as social.

2. Setting the scene: the concepts of standard language and standardization

Standardization which leads to the emergence of the standard form of language, is a complex process. In the approach of Trudgill (1999, 2011), it involves *determination*, which consists in the selection of a reference variety of a language for "particular purposes in the society or nation in question," *codification* whereby it "acquires a publicly recognized and fixed form," and subsequent *stabilization* whereby the formerly diffuse form of language undergoes focusing through the spread of the established linguistic norms to all discourse and as a result becomes (more) fixed and stable (Trudgill 1999: 117).

Reflecting on the nature of the phenomenon of standardization, J. Milroy (2001: 531) observes that its essence lies in the imposition of invariance

or uniformity on objects, including abstract objects such as languages or language varieties, which are not inherently invariable. Thus, "uniformity… becomes in itself an important defining characteristic of a standardized form of language." Nevertheless, if the standardized variety is to correspond to a sociolinguistic reality, it can never be completely invariant. The reason is that not being a system of weights and measures,

> language can never be fully fixed; if such were the case, it would no longer be functional as an instrument of communication, which has to be flexible to be able to adapt itself to changed circumstances. (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006: 252)

In fact, as observed by Hudson (1980: 34), given that languages inevitably change across space and through time, the assumption of full uniformity and stability would make the standard variety an unusual, perhaps even a pathological object. Thus, rather than bringing about complete uniformity and stability, the process of standardization, by promoting recognized linguistic norms, may at the most inhibit language change and suppress variation (J. Milroy 2000: 13–14).[3]

Considered from the perspective of sociology and anthropology of culture, linguistic standardization may be seen as part of "cultural focusing," a higher-level concept embracing efforts undertaken to regularize various aspects of social life, including linguistic expression (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2005: 38). However, if standardization involves not only the formation of a recognisable set of linguistic norms, codification and subsequent diffusion of these norms to all discourse, but also acceptance of a special status of the selected variety by the community, the problem of which variety is recognized as the standard is not just a linguistic problem of characterizing the structural and functional criteria that can help delimit and distinguish it from other varieties of the language in question (Hudson 1980: 32–33). To the extent that standardization is:

> a phenomenon in a linguistic community in which institutional maintenance of certain valued linguistic practices – in theory, fixed – acquires an explicitly-recognized hegemony over the definition of the community's norm (Silverstein 1996: 285–286),

it is a deliberate, regulatory process as a result of which certain linguistic norms become valourised and prescribed at the expense of others. As a result, the linguistic community becomes

[3] As Kroch (1978) argues, standardization may even lead to more or less conscious efforts on the part of speakers to reverse internal linguistic change in progress.

> united in adherence to the idea that there exists a functionally differentiated norm of using their "language" denotationally (to represent or describe things), the inclusive range of which the best language users are believed to have mastered in the appropriate way. There may be no actual historical individual who, in fact, does; that is not the point. It is allegiance to the concept of such a functionally differentiated denotational form of usage, said to define the "best" speakers of language L, that marks membership in a specific linguistic community for language L, and a sense of continuity with it. (Silverstein 1996: 285)

Seen in this light, the standard is a culturally and socio-politically saturated construct that arises through deliberate efforts undertaken by society in the course of a complex historical process (Inoue 2006; Hudson 1981; J. Milroy 1999, 2000, 2001; Silverstein 1996).

The question whether the concept of standard language can be divorced from axiological, aesthetic, or even moral notions of value or goodness, elegance, prestige, authority and symbolic function divides the linguistic community. The disagreement cuts across the divide over the proper object of the study of language in two influential contemporary perspectives on language, in core Chomskyan linguistics and in sociolinguistics.

In Chomskyan mentalistic, deductive, theory-oriented approach, the object of linguistic inquiry are the shared properties of I-languages, that is, individual mental grammars internal to each speaker. To clearly distinguish between knowledge of language or linguistic competence and the complexity of linguistic performance in real-time social interactions, in which also non-linguistic factors play a role, the linguistic environment in which first language is acquired is taken to be completely homogeneous. As a result of this theoretical abstraction, the study of language is the study of individual mental grammars which do not vary within or across the ideal speakers-hearers in their linguistic community, intraspeaker (idiolectal) and interspeaker variation falling out of the purview of scientific linguistic inquiry into Universal Grammar (Chomsky 1965, 1995).[4] Just as group, community or societal grammars, the so-called externalized or E-languages – not having a clear ontological status – are not the proper object of study, also

[4] An important argument advanced by Chomsky (1965) in support of the abstraction of I-languages to complete homogeneity is that there is no reason to assume that learning a language in a completely homogeneous speech community would not be possible. However, as Wilson and Henry (1998) point out, for the language faculty to delimit the class of possible human languages, it must be designed to accommodate variation in the input. If linguistic diversity is an inherent part of the human language faculty, abstracting away from its existence and range cannot offer much insight into the parametric requirements of the language faculty and the range of variation that it permits.

questions of value, authority or prestige do not have any role to play in this approach. The reason is not that they are not valid in the study of the phenomenon of language in all its complexity, which must encompass matters relating to the use of language in verbal communication, but because they do not belong with the abstract study of the organization of individual grammars as these grammars reflect the architecture of the universal language faculty. By definition, linguistic inquiry into the workings of the human language faculty cannot be prescriptive. It can only be descriptive (cf., among others, Pinker 1994).[5]

As core theoretical linguists tend to be speakers of standard languages, the I-languages that are the data source on which theoretical arguments are built are on the whole quite stable and uniform and further, as natively acquired cognitive entities, they are natural objects (cf. Adger and Trousdale 2007). However, if microvariation, the finer-grained diversity observed within I-grammars and within community grammars, which may be an instrument of the construction of psychological and social meaning (Eckert 2000), and may be affected by the knowledge and by the more or less covertly ideological prescriptivism of the standard variety supressing variation (Kerswill 2007; Kroch and Small 1978), is precluded from the theoretical study of linguistic competence, the reference variety underlying the I-grammars that is the data source for the study of the invariant properties of I-languages is an idealization. This aspect of Chomsky's approach has been heavily criticized on the grounds that both transmission and acquisition of language do not take place in a social vacuum. The criticism has not only been voiced by the opponents of his theory of syntax, but it has arisen also within the generative paradigm. As Wilson and Henry (1998: 18–19) have argued, if the abstract internal grammar of a natural language is to be acquired in the face of variable input, the language acquisition device must be designed to cope with variability in the input, and "to avoid information on real-time variation is to ignore evidence central to the nature of the very component designed to accommodate variation." However, to the extent that the parameters hypothesized to account for the range and limits of variation across languages also constrain the range and limits of variation within languages, I-languages are not uniform but rather, they are inherently variable.[6] On this approach, I-languages as cognitive objects and

[5] For a recent discussion that questions the common assumption that descriptivism is free from value-judgements in contrast to prescriptivism, commonly viewed as inherently evaluative, see Cameron (2012).

[6] In the current model of the generative theory of syntax, parametric variation is located in the lexicon and is attributed to the differences in the features of particular items, including functional heads. Parameters capture the variable properties of language, i.e.

E-languages as social objects do not exist independently from each other, but rather they influence each other in the minds of the speakers. As some studies of acquisition of linguistic and social norms demonstrate, complex patterns of linguistic variation and the social constraints on the linguistic variables may be acquired by children in tandem with language acquisition more generally (Smith et al. 2013).

In modern sociolinguistics, an inductive, usage-oriented enterprise founded on the assumption that languages are properties of linguistic communities rather than knowledge states that arise solely in the minds of individual speakers (cf. Labov 1972), language is an object with "orderly heterogeneity," in which "native-like command of heterogeneous structures is not a matter of multidialectalism or 'mere' performance, but is part of unilingual linguistic competence" (Weinreich et al. 1968: 100–101). The ever-changing structure of language is "itself embedded in the larger context of the speech community, in such a way that social and geographic variations are intrinsic elements of the structure" (Weinreich et al. 1968: 185). In this approach, variability is the defining, inherent property of the social phenomenon of language. However, variation is not random, but structured, as speakers of the same backgrounds tend to use the same proportion of variants of linguistic variables.

Nevertheless, views on how change and variation take place differ in sociolinguistic theory.[7] For Labov (1972), individuals are the object of study

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the properties that are underspecified by the language faculty. For example, if modals instantiate the category V(erb), they can be expected to occur in non-finite clauses, as in Old English, but if they instantiate the category of finite T(ense) in a language or a different stage of a language, the prediction is that they can only occur in finite clauses, as in Modern English (Roberts and Roussou 2002). This has consequences for the overall shape of the grammar. If modals originate in the V-position in a bi-clausal structure, they have to move in the syntax to the T-position (Old English), but if they are merged in the T-position, the structure with a modal is mono-clausal and there is no movement (Modern English). Thus, learning the lexicon is not just learning an unpredictable component of language, the component associated with de Saussurean arbitrariness. It is also learning the parametric structural profile of the language. Language change and variability can arise as a result of changes in the features of the relevant properties of particular items. In addition, sets of features may be spelled with more than one morphological form at different stages of the language or in different dialects of the grammar of a given language. To the extent that the grammar specifies a pool of variant forms, the choice of a variant by a speaker can depend on a variety of factors, including phonological fitness, ease of lexical access, sociolinguistic status, etc. (cf. Adger and Smith 2010).

[7] In core theoretical linguistics, which takes language to be a cognitive entity constructed unconsciously by individual speakers on the basis of exposure to real data, a grammar changes when a new generation of speakers internalizes a linguistic system

only insofar as they provide the data that can form the basis for the description of community grammars:

> What is the origin of a linguistic change? Clearly not an act some one individual whose tongue slips, or who slips into an odd habit of his own. We define language … as an instrument used by the members of the community to communicate with one another. Idiosyncratic habits are not a part of language so conceived, and idiosyncratic changes no more so. Therefore we can say that the language has changed only when a group of speakers use a different pattern to communicate with each other. … The origin of a change *is* its "propagation" or acceptance of others. (Labov 1972: 277)

For others, including J. Milroy (2001) and Keller (1994), language change must be studied with a view to explaining individual-based variation, since change begins in the speech of individuals, i.e. in individual grammars, from where it may find its way into community grammars (cf. also Croft 2002).[8] This ties in with the much quoted observation made by Sapir many years before the advent of modern sociolinguistics in the sixties of the past century that:

> [t]wo individuals of the same generation and locality, speaking precisely the same dialect and moving in the same circles, are never absolutely at one in their speech habits. A minute investigation of the speech of each individual would reveal countless differences of detail…. In a sense they speak slightly divergent dialects of the same language rather than identically the same language. (Sapir 1921: 147)

The reasons that sociolinguists have given to explain variation in individual and community grammars typically include both speaker-independent, internal and external, social factors including speaker parameters of age, sex, etc., situational contexts of interaction, social groupings and social net-

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that differs from the grammars of the adults in their community. The new grammar generates changes in the output of the speakers which is the input for new speakers acquiring language, leading to a further change. In contrast, for sociolinguists, who take language to exist and crucially to belong to the linguistic community of speakers as a group, change, apart from external factors such as production and processing constraints, arises in social interactions and is related to social variables such as sex, age, social class, etc. For a discussion of the main forces for change in language, including structural, functional and social types of change from different theoretical perspectives see Croft (2002) and Roberts and Roussou (2002). It should be borne in mind that since variation can be historically stable, as the variability in the use of relativizers *who/whom/which/that/Ø* in English illustrates, it is a a necessary, but not a sufficient cause of change.

8 Keller (1994: 139) captures individual-based variation with the maxim of distinctness, the urge of speakers to speak in such a way as to be noticed.

works within a community.[9] While it is common in sociolinguistics to take linguistic heterogeneity as deriving from and echoing social heterogeneity (cf., among others, Chambers 2003), Eckert (2000) argues that the relationships between individual and community or group grammars may be more complex than this, variation not only reflecting independently existing social stratification of speakers, but rather serving as an instrument for speakers to give new psychological and social meaning to linguistic forms through reinterpretation of the meanings already accepted within the group or community of speakers. In this sense, (stylistic) variation may be an instrument for the construction of symbolic social meaning.

If it is the case that speakers' selection of linguistic forms not only for denotational, but also for symbolic purposes is only meaningful in the course of interpretation and evaluation in social interactions, variation cannot be easily detached from valuation. This is the view taken by among others, Chambers (2003), Hudson (1980), and J. Milroy (1999, 2000, 2001). In this tradition, the idea of the standard cannot be divorced from value judgments and hence, from language ideology. Against this tradition, Trudgill (1999, 2011) has argued that the linguistic properties of the standard variety can be characterized and delimited without appeal to value-judgments and thus, standard language can be understood as simply one from a range of extant dialects or varieties of the language in question, spoken and written by a socially well-defined group of speakers, the data of which is demonstrated in language corpora. To appreciate the influence that the existence of publicly recognized norms and associated value-judgments may have not only on the acquisition and use of language in social contexts, but also on the beliefs about language, consequences of standardization are briefly discussed in the next section.

3. Consequences of standardization in linguistics and beyond

The consequences of language standardization and subsequent prescription are far-reaching and multifaceted (Inoue 2006; J. Milroy 1999, 2000, 2001;

[9] Internally-caused change is usually explained in functional terms in sociolinguistic theory, e.g. it is phonologically-conditioned, there is cognitive pressure for symmetry in phonological and morphological systems, etc. (cf., among others, Labov 1994). However, such explanations fall short of explaining why the initial change causing significant changes should occur in the first place. For Sapir (1921: 154), individuals have an involuntary tendency to vary the norm. While individual variations may be unconscious and random, languages drift: "[t]he drift of a language is constituted by the unconscious selection on the part of its speakers of those individual variations that are cumulative in some special direction" (Sapir 1921: 155).

Silverstein 1996; cf. also Bex 2000; Hope 2000; Peters 2006; Pinker 1994; Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2005; Watts 1999, 2000).

With the selection of a valourised variety, the terms *standard* and *non-standard* acquire positively/negatively-specifiable values of legitimacy/illegitimacy despite the fact that such attributions do not belong to languages themselves, as

> […] languages are not themselves moral objects. … [n]o moral judgment or critical evaluation can be validly made about the abstract structures we call languages. It is the speakers of languages, and not languages themselves, who live in a moral universe. (J. Milroy 1999: 16)

According to Inoue (2006: 122), the ideologization of standard languages is historically related to modernization and nation-state formation:[10]

> Language standardization has been one of the crucial projects of national modernity, seemingly obligatory in the context of industrial takeoff, urbanization, rational bureaucratic state formation, and the emergence of civil society. In modernizing social institutions, such as education, labor markets, administration, the military and the media, and in nationalizing the populace as the nation's citizen-subjects, language standardization was associated explicitly with the instrumentalist notions of 'efficiency', 'progress,' and 'rationality.'

Elevated to the status of a nation-defining variety, the standard has a role to play in language maintenance and planning policies, which involve deliberate institutional decisions and efforts, as a result of which the linguistic practices are affected in all sections of the community. Conscious of social stigma attached to non-standard forms recommended not to be used by language authorities or "shamans" (cf. Pinker 1994), the socially and linguistically privileged speakers strongly tend to avoid such forms, especially in (more) formal discourse, despite their relative frequency in spontaneous production in all discourse, including their own (cf. Crystal 2006; Kerswill 2007; Kroch and Small 1978).[11] For example, Kroch and Small (1978) attribute differences in the frequencies of structures with and without par-

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[10] The association of progress and modernity with possession of a standard language is at the heart of the emergence of standard Japanese in late 19th century as well as standard Thai. In the latter case, the grammatical system of the language was modelled on English and other European languages in recognition of their world status as languages of modernized nations (Inoue 2006: 123).

[11] For Watts (1999), one of the stable and significant successes of prescriptivism is the rise of metalinguistic awareness of differences not only in the standard and non-standard grammars, but also of the awareness of the social attitudes to such differences.

ticle movement (e.g. *John pointed the mistake out* vs. *John pointed out the mistake*) and with or without *that*-deletion (e.g. *Sally knows Harry ate the salami* vs. *Sally knows that Harry ate the salami*) in a sample of analysed radio talk-show conversations to the influence of grammatical ideology on the use of language by radio hosts/guests, who due to their public role use language in a way that is closer to the norms of the written standard compared with the less careful usage by callers. In addition, more in a group of college undergraduates asked to evaluate the correctness of structures with and without particle movement thought structures without particle movement (e.g. *John called up Mary*) to be (substantially) more correct compared with structures with particle movement (*John called Mary up*), and more students in another group judged structures without *that*-deletion to be (substantially) more correct compared with cognate structures with *that*-deletion. For Kroch and Small (1978), the speakers' belief that sentences without particle movement and without *that*-deletion are more correct is grounded in the ideology of the standard prescribing that surface syntax should reflect propositional form iconically. As a result of this prescription, the particle placed next to the verb is taken to better reflect the semantic unity of the verb and the particle. An overt complementizer "can be said to indicate more explicitly the logical relationship between the matrix verb and the complement clause" (Kroch and Small 1978: 48).[12] While there is no conclusive evidence supporting a causal relationship between grammatical ideology and language change (Peters 2006), stigmatization of certain features of non-standard English may have speeded up their disappearance from use in public or more formal discourse, e.g. it may be behind the ultimate disappearance of *ain't* as a negator from Standard English in the nineteenth century and more generally, absence of negative concord in the grammar of standard English, a process that started already in the fifteenth century (Nevalainen 2003).[13] At the same time, speakers of non-standard varieties are dominated by the hegemony of the standard and have to learn the standard in school as the language of wider communication.

[12] While some variation may be inherent to the grammar of natural language, existence of variant forms inevitably leads to linguistic instability and feeds speaker insecurity in standard language cultures. For recent discussions of the social effects of prescriptive ideology on British English speakers, especially their insecurity about the correctness of their language, see Cameron (2012), Crystal (2006) and Peters (2006).

[13] Anderwald's (2014) study provides evidence for the influence of modern-style prescriptivism on American newspaper language, in particular, for the sharp drop in the use of progressive passive in media language that can be attributed to the success of the publication in the US of a highly popular manual on style and its advice "to avoid the passive" (Alderwald 2014: 14).

In the process, speakers of non-standard varieties often come to believe that their vernacular is an inferior form of language, the phenomenon known in sociolinguistics as linguistic insecurity (cf., among others, Hudson 1980: 199),[14] and may have problems with acceptability judgments about certain standard forms which are grammatically different from semantically and functionally comparable structures in their vernacular (Adger and Trousdale 2007: 265).

The rise of the standard also has an effect on how the language is perceived and represented in the community. As J. Milroy (2000) argues, the ideology of nationhood – sometimes also of race – requires that the standard be legitimized by receiving an uninterrupted history. Thus the development of a language is often unilinear in historiography, stretching back to the earliest available records. This is, for example, how the history of the English language is presented by among others, Baugh and Cable (1978), where Standard English is the privileged variety that is a direct continuation of Old English, its ancestor variety.[15] To uphold the dictum of purity of standard language, the standard tends to be seen as essentially "unmixed" and free form "corruptions" that pervade non-standard varieties, even despite ample evidence to the contrary. To the extent that the standard varies over historical time and across communities, variation in the standard is considered to be independent of its speakers, internally-caused, systematic and thus legitimate, in contrast to non-standard varieties, which are often taken to vary randomly and thus to be linguistically aberrant. This despite the fact that "[l]anguage exists only in so far as it is actually used – spoken and heard, written and read" (Sapir 1921: 154–155) and that only dead languages which do not have native speakers have invariant forms. It is indeed ironical that minority language movements in multicultural, linguistically inherently variable societies possessing a reference variety should adopt the ideology of the standard in their efforts to establish their own linguistic

[14] As attitudes to what is standard can differ and change over historical time, also speakers of Standard English may in principle become linguistically insecure. See Fabricius (2002) for a discussion of the rise of Estuary English against the backdrop of the changing social landscape of Britain, where traditional social class-based as well as sex- and age-based distinctions are weakening. The social changes are beginning to lead to new patterns of social elites, standardization and stigmatization. As a result of these changes, RP speakers are increasingly becoming linguistically insecure, mainly due to the fact that the RP accent has been acquiring negative value-attributions of snobbishness and untrustworthiness. Note that the same feature can carry prestige in one variety of Standard English, but not in another. A case in point is the prestige associated with the non-rhotic accent in most of England and the stigmatization of non-rhotic accent in New York.

[15] For a dissenting view, see, among others, Hope (2000).

identity and choose to represent the non-standard vernacular languages as uniform and stable, thus overtly subscribing "to a monoglot ideology, the same language ideology that the dominant language groups deploy to marginalize variation" (Inoue 2006: 124).

The development of the standard also impinges on the methodology and scope of language description as well as linguistic theorizing. The knowledge of the requirements of the standard has an effect on the choices made by linguists delineating the linguistic boundaries of the standard language:

> although linguists often disapprove of popular attitudes to correctness, they are themselves in some respects affected by the ideology that conditions these popular views – the ideology of language standardisation with its emphasis on formal and written styles and neglect of the structure of spoken language. (J. Milroy 1999: 39)

If the construction of spoken discourse, due to its inherently interactive character, has its own set of linguistic characteristics (Carter and McCarthy 2006; Cheshire 1987, 1996, 1999), neglect of spoken discourse and the belief that the norms of spoken language are the same as the norms of written language are problematic for the linguistic categorization of forms as standard or non-standard. For example, as Carter and McCarthy (2006: 168) point out, "[w]hat may be considered 'non-standard' in writing may well be 'standard' in speech," including

> split infinitves (e.g. *He decided* ***to*** *immediately* ***sell*** *it*), double negation (e.g. *He* ***won't*** *be late I* ***don't*** *think*, as compared to *I* ***don't*** *think he* ***will*** *be late*), singular nouns after plural measurement expressions (e.g. *He's about six* ***foot*** *tall*), the use of contracted forms such as *gonna* (going to), *wanna* (want to), and so on. (Cater and McCarthy 2006: 167)

Inattention to the linguistic characteristics of spoken language in contrast to the norms of the written forms may in turn lead to a misrepresentation of the range of extant variation not only in the standard, but also in regional non-standard varieties, as well as impinge on the linguistic characterization of the emergent international varieties of the standard, the so-called New Englishes, the main data-source for which is spoken language. For example, New Englishes are said to be characterized by the use of so-called copy-pronouns in left-dislocated structures, as illustrated with the pronoun 'she' in the sentence *My daughter, she is attending the University of Nairobi* (Dąbrowska 2013: 111). However, as Carter and McCarthy (2006: 235) point out, although such structures are rare or do not occur in writing, they are widespread and normal in spoken discourse of adult, educated speakers of the traditional varieties of Standard English.

As J. Milroy (2001) observes, in linguistic communities that lack linguistic forms recognized as standard, as in the Pacific Ocean area, where most world's linguistic variation is found, speakers do not have a sense of the existence of clear, determinate boundaries of their own language (J. Milroy 2001). However, given the "involuntary tendency of individuals to vary the norm" (Sapir 1921: 154), existence of some amount of microvariation can be expected even in linguistically isolated and socioeconomically homogeneous communities. To the extent that such variation occurs (cf. Dorian 1994), it could suggest that for linguistic differences to catch the conscious or unconscious attention of speakers in monolingual communities and to give rise to a sense of linguistic heterogeneity within the community, the variation that occurs must carry enough cultural and/or social loading, the boundaries on the language spoken serving as a means for the creation of community identify. In the absence of "publicly recognized norms" or markers stratifying speakers linguistically in a socially homogeneous community, there are no determinate boundaries on one's own language that could arise in the speakers' minds. This is why only in standard language cultures the public routinely involves itself in discourses and practices aimed at perfecting their language. As Cameron (2012: vi) observes, the purifying, normative as well as prescriptive efforts, which she refers to as "verbal hygiene" practices need not been taken all negatively, as they testify to

> the capacity for metalinguistic reflexivity which makes human linguistic communication so uniquely flexible and nuanced. That capacity fulfils important functions in everyday communication (enabling us, for instance, to correct errors and misunderstandings), but it cannot be restricted to those functions. Its more elaborate forms exemplify a tendency seen throughout human history: reflection on what we observe in the world prompts the impulse to intervene in the world, take control of it, make it better. In relation to language, that impulse leads to a proliferation of norms defining what is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Though their ostensible purpose is to regulate language, these norms may also express deeper anxieties which are not linguistic, but social, moral and political.

It is interesting to note that as Baugh and Cable (1978: 201) explain, the prescriptive norms and attitudes of the eighteenth century that gave rise to what J. Milroy (1999, 2000) calls standard language ideology and standard language culture grew out of much earlier public preoccupation with language, which they relate to the emergence of a new middle class in the later part of the sixteenth century that brought along emergence of social consciousness of socio-economic as well as cultural and linguistic standards to aspire to. It was the first time language itself had become an object of critical

reflection on the part of a wide range of individuals, including clergymen, schoolmasters, scientists, urging its purity and fitness for learned and literary use as well the need to control its forms for the benefit of education, as can be illustrated with the views of Sir John Cheke, an early spelling reformer, who also disapproved of English being mingled with other languages:

> our tung shold be written cleane and pure, vumixt and vnmangled with borrowing of other tungs wherein if we take not heed bi tijm, euer borrowing and neuer payeming, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. (J. Cheke 1561, quoted in Fisiak 1993: 99)

the views of Richard Mulcaster appealing for a grammar of English to be written to

> reduce our English tung to som certain rule for writing and reading, for words and for speaking, for sentence and ornament, that men maie know, when theie write or speak right. (R. Mulcaster 1585, quoted in Fisiak 1993: 103–104)

as well as the views of Thomas Elyot, the author of *The Governour*, the first book on education to be printed in England, who argued that English should be taught to those who would be occupied professionally at the court in such a way that they should:

> speke none englisshe but that which is cleane, polite, perfectly and accurately pronounced, omitting no letter or sillable. (T. Elyot 1563, quoted in Baugh and Cable 1978: 213)

As the quote from Elyot indicates, the standardization process which reached its peak in the eighteenth century was inherently a belief-forming system. Although the choice of one variety for use in a polite, cultured society does not in itself imply that all the other varieties should acquire negative attributions, dialectal varieties of English, once cherished as evidence of the richness and copiousness of English (Watts 2000), became castigated between ca. 1500 and 1750, as is clear, for example from Thomas Sheridan's stand on the difference between two varieties spoken in London:

> As amongst these various dialects, one must have the preference, and become fashionable, it will of course fall to the lot of that which prevails at court, the source of fashions of all kinds. All other dialects, are sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, pedantic, or mechanical education; and therefore have some degree of disgrace attached to them. (T. Sheridan 1762, quoted in Watts 2000: 36)

The need for a socially prestigious form of language to have a fixed form is responsible for the formation of firm beliefs that it should be based on

clear norms, ensuring its stability. In *The Plan of a Dictionary* Samuel Johnson notes that the overarching principle of language use is

> to make no innovation, without a reason sufficient to balance the inconvenience of change; and such reasons I do not expect to find. All change is of itself an evil, which ought not to be hazarded for evident advantage; and as inconstancy is in every case a mark of weakness, it will add nothing to the reputation of our tongue. (S. Johnson 1747, quoted in Watts 2000: 39).

While Johnson himself later came to recognize the inherently variable nature of language and even inevitability of change (Nelson 2006: 462), the preoccupation of eighteenth century grammarians, school teachers, rhetoricians as well as linguistically untrained commentators – the prescriptive culture that they gave rise to – with "regulating" language so that it can become stable and uniform has had a profound influence on popular attitudes to usage and style. As a result of continual "verbal hygiene practices", the common belief is that where there are variants to consider, "the alternatives are rarely seen as neutral. The expectation is that "only one of them is 'correct', only one can be good for you" (Peters 2006: 774). That this is true is also clear from Cameron's (2012: 9) remark quoted below:

> I have never met anyone who did not subscribe, in one way or another, to the belief that language can be 'right' or 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', more or less 'elegant' or 'effective' or 'appropriate'. Of course, there is massive disagreement about what values to espouse, and how to define them. Yet however people may pick and choose, it is rare to find anyone rejecting altogether the idea that there is some legitimate authority in language.

The history of Standard English thus shows that the process of codification of a particular variety that is to fulfil special social purposes is a socioculturally saturated process in which language cannot be detached from value-judgments, prestige and stigma. This is the social aspect of standard language. But Standard English is also a natural variety in that it is acquired and used natively. Recall that for Trudgill (1999, 2011), one of the special features of Standard English is that for the most part it is uniform as a result of codification of its distinctive linguistic features. The question that arises is whether the criterion of uniformity can be successfully applied to characterize the internal grammars inherent to native speakers of Standard English and whether the fact that the community grammar does not vary for the most part as a result of standardization, also the grammars of native speakers of Standard English are for the most part stable and uniform. This question is addressed in some detail in the next section.

4. The question of stability and uniformity of Standard English

There is general agreement that there is a well-delimited set of linguistic properties of English that characterizes Standard English and helps draw the linguistic boundary between Standard English and non-standard varieties of English. This distinctive set of properties is widely believed to be grammatical in nature, excluding matters of lexis and most of all, excluding pronunciation. The reason why it is the grammar or rather syntax of English that can provide the criteria for the delineation of Standard English is that

> [t]he grammar of Standard English is much more stable and uniform than its pronunciation or word stock: there is remarkably little dispute about what is grammatical (in compliance with the rules of grammar) and what isn't. Of course, the small number of controversial points that there are – trouble spots like *who* versus *whom* – get all the public discussion in language columns and letters to the editor, so it may seem as if there is much turmoil: but the passions evinced over such problematic points should not obscure the fact that for the vast majority of questions about what's allowed in Standard English, the answers are clear. (Huddleston and Pullum 2005: 1–2)

Thus, although there is enough variation in evidence within the "standard" variety of language across the English-speaking world to distinguish several regional forms of the "standard English language," including Standard British English, Standard American English, Standard Scottish English, Standard Australian English as well as to classify some native New or World Englishes as standard (cf., among others, J. Milroy 1999; Quirk et al. 1972; Trudgill 1999, 2011; Trudgill and Hannah 2008), there must be some non-regional form of English that makes it possible for all the regional varieties to be brought under one umbrella term, that of Standard English. Crucially, regardless of how the distinctive set of grammatical choices is delimited, it must be largely invariant not only in the non-regional variety, but also within each regional standard dialect.

The view that English has a set of remarkably invariant grammatical properties present in all the regionally distinguished national Englishes is quite well-established in the descriptive tradition of English linguistics. For example, Quirk et al. (1972: 29) refer to this invariant set of grammatical properties as

> the common core of English which constitutes the major part of any variety of English, however specialized, and without which fluency in any variety at a higher than parrot level is impossible.

As this common core is shared by "all kinds of English" (Quirk 1964: 94), Standard English is

> [a] universal form of English; it is the kind used everywhere by educated people. It is, moreover, the official form of English, the only kind which is used for public information and administration. It thus has a quite different standing in the English-speaking world from the dialects, and this non-dialectal kind of English is best called Standard English. (D. Abercrombie (1955), quoted in Strang 1962: 20)

If the criterion for classifying a linguistic variety is education, the characterization of Standard English is sociolinguistic. Trudgill (1999, 2011) argues that Standard English is not an accent, as it can be spoken with a regional or local accent, it is not a style, as it can be used in both formal and informal contexts, and it is not a register, not being defined by situational characteristics such as speaker's purpose, the setting, the purpose of communication, and the field of discourse. Rather, it is simply one among many dialects of English, unusual in not having an associated accent and spoken natively only by educated speakers, but being a natural variety of the English language, it has distinctive and thus idiosyncratic properties, among which are the following eight:

(1) Standard English (SE) does not distinguish between the forms of the auxiliary *do* and its main verb forms, unlike non-standard varieties (NSE):
You did it, did you? SE
You done it, did you? NSE

(2) SE has an irregular present tense verb morphology encoding with *–s* only the features of third person singular number. Many other dialects use either zero for all persons or *–s* for all persons:
They kick the ball into the river. SE
They kicks the ball into the river. NSE

(3) SE bans double negation (negative concord), while most nonstandard varieties permit it:
I don't want any. SE
I don't want none. NSE

(4) SE has an irregular formation of reflexive pronouns, with *myself* based on the possessive *my*, *himself* based on the object form *him*. Most nonstandard varieties generalize the possessive form, e.g. *hisself*, *theirselves*.

(5) SE fails to distinguish between second person singular and second person plural pronouns, having *you* in both cases. In many nonstandard varieties, there are different forms in the singular, e.g. singular *thou* and plural *you*, or singular *you* and plural *youse*.

(6) SE has irregular inflection of the verb *to be* in both the present and the past tense (*am, is, are, was, were*). Many nonstandard varieties do not mark person and number in present and past tense forms of *to be* (*I/you/he/she/we/they be* and *I/you/he/she/we/they were*).
(7) SE redundantly distinguishes between past tense and past participle forms of many irregular verbs, e.g. *I saw* vs. *I have seen*, where in many NSE varieties, there is no distinction between the past tense (*seen*) and the past participle form (*seen*), while the perfect aspect is marked in NSE non-redundantly with *have*, as in *I have seen* vs. *I seen*.
(8) SE has a two-way contrast in its demonstrative system, with *this* (near to the speaker) opposed to *that* (away from the speaker). Many NSE varieties have a three-way system, with a further distinction between *that* (near to the listener) and *yon* (away from both speaker and listener).

Although various studies, including Trudgill's work on dialectal English (Trudgill and Chambers 1991; cf. also Aarts and McMahon 2006, Britain 2007, Hope 2000, and Trudgill and Hannah 2008), have identified further idiosyncratic features of Standard English in contrast to NSE varieties, the differences between Standard English and all the other non-standard varieties are on the whole viewed as rather small. In addition, for Trudgill they concern mostly if not exclusively matters of morphosyntax. This need not indicate that there is no actual syntactic variation in English and that there need not be deep-seated differences in dialectal grammars compared with Standard English.[16] Rather, what this seems to indicate is that syntactic variation is much harder to observe and categorize than morphological, lexical or phonological variation (cf. Adger and Trousdale 2007; Cheshire 1987). In fact, as Mair and Leech (2006) point out, there are quite a few areas of English grammar currently undergoing some observable significant changes, including the increasing use of the progressive aspect and semi-modals, the decline of *who/which* relative pronouns, the rise in the use of *that* as a relativizer, the rise of relative *that*-deletion, the use of singular *they* (e.g. *Everybody came in their car*), etc. (cf. also Bauer 1994). Some of these changes have been in progress for some time now. Furthermore, the density of the changes depends not only on style (formal vs. colloquial), but also on text type (cf., among others, Biber et al. 1999). The on-going increase in the progressive gave rise to the emergence of progressive passive (e.g. *Dinner*

[16] Henry's (2002) study of Belfast English shows that while it is clearly constrained by a parametric setting, this setting is not simply different from the parameters that constrain the shape of Standard English grammar. It is in fact a different set of grammatical choices, delineating a different grammar.

was being prepared) ousting passival progressive (e.g. *Dinner was preparing*) in the course of the nineteenth century, first occurrences of progressive passive recorded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when Standard English had already been largely codified. As shown in Anderwald (2014), the rise in the progressive passive is highly dependent on text-type. Nineteenth century also brought the rise of *get*-passive and phrasal verbs (Baugh and Cable 1978: 336–337).

To the extent that change is always in progress, the grammatical choices available to speakers of Standard English may be expected to vary and there must be "a certain amount of room for variation in the standard" (Bauer 1994: 2). Although Trudgill readily makes allowance for some degree of indeterminacy primarily due to dialect contact, Standard English being subject to linguistic change like all dialects, it is the claim of uniformity or invariance and the belief that "in most cases, a feature is either standard or it is not" (1999: 123) that is the most problematic for his characterization of Standard English as a natural object with distinctive grammatical properties which can be delimited independently of language ideological concerns.[17] The question is who or what decides whether a feature is or is not standard. If it is the speaker who decides, then there may well be no actual speaker of Standard English whose internal grammar is in all relevant respects exactly like the grammar of another speaker of Standard English, speakers having a natural tendency to vary the norm (cf. Eckert 2000; Keller 1994; Sapir 1921). What seems closer to reality is that in Modern Standard English spoken today, just as in Tudor England, when the first written and spoken variety of standard English, called Court English, is believed to have emerged, there are "alternative expressions in varying degrees of competition with each other in the language of the same set of individuals" (Nevalainen 2003: 138).[18] If so, it is an impossible task to attempt to impose fixed

[17] The impression that Trudgill, who illustrates cases of indeterminacy with the use of *than* as a preposition (*He is bigger than me*) or as a conjunction (*He is bigger than I am*) as well as impurities such as the use of the indefinite this in colloquial narratives (e.g. *There was this man, and he'd got this gun* … etc.), is that indeterminacy is negligent in the grammar of Standard English.

[18] The question of the development of Standard English is a complex one and there is much disagreement in the literature about whether it should be traced back to Chancery English, a kind of spelling system exhibiting quite a wide range of variation, or to levelled, spoken contact varieties with interdialectal features, that is features absent from the input dialects. According to Rissanen (2000), being confined mainly to bureaucratic, mercantile and business documents, but not having a spoken correlate, Chancery English was a merely a register defined by special situational characteristics rather than a standard language in the modern sense of the term, in which the elaboration of function of the standard is its defining property.

boundaries on Standard English, which like all other varieties of a living language, is a dynamic entity with enough underspecified features to allow for individual, stylistic, text-type based and register-based differenced to be expressed linguistically.

Independently of whether native speakers of Standard English need not pass value-judgments on the grammars of other native speakers they interact with in real-time interactions, as may be true of young children acquiring English as their first language, they must be able to observe the differences in the grammars of different speakers in their linguistic environment and to construct their own grammars in the face of input contributed by a variety of different speakers, each with their own idiolect.[19] If the arbiter on what is and what is not a standard form is to be an external authority, whether the authoritative *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* or some other authority deciding on the rules of Standard English grammar, it must be possible to put objectively defined boundaries on the linguistic properties of Standard English in the first place. However, as Cameron (2012) argues, "rules arise from and themselves give rise to arguments," the rules of language being no different from other rules expected to be followed in social interactions. As a result of on-going variation and instability, an external arbiter such as an authoritative dictionary may take a different stand on the standardness of a given feature between two of its editions spanning the period of just eight years (Bauer 1994: 2). Some linguistic properties of Standard English are and have continued to be variable and thus subject to complex and often confusing linguistic descriptions in which even expert linguists admit insecurity marking structures they find difficult to fully accept with the question mark, as Quirk et al. (1972: 869) do in reference to the sentence *?He smokes as expensive cigarettes as he can afford*, and many other structures illustrating various grammatical features of Standard English. In this respect, the problem that descriptive grammarians describing Standard English encounter today need not be fundamentally different from the problems of eighteenth-century prescriptivists. Perhaps the main reason why no comprehensive description of the grammar of Standard English emerged in the eighteenth century was that the grammarians and rhetoricians found too much variation in the use of language in their communities (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006).[20]

[19] As Standard English embraces grammatical structures that need not be acquired in early childhood (e.g. *Had I more money, I'd buy a BMW*), native speakers may have the intuition that they do not belong to their internalized grammars in the same way as more common variant structures (e.g. *If I had more money, I'd buy a BMW*). See Preston (2004) for discussion.

[20] More importantly from the prescriptivists' point of view, there was too much variation even in the language used by those whose usage they would have judged

While the codification of English in the eighteenth century and the dissemination of the norms contributed to a suppression of variation in (more) formal discourse, especially written (cf. Baugh and Cable 1978), it would be unrealistic to assume that suppression of variation in usage testifies to loss of ability of individual speakers to vary the norm.[21] In addition, as Cheshire (1996) argues, spoken grammar, where structures which would be hard to classify and explain using the categories typically applied in linguistic descriptions mostly based on written corpora supplemented with the linguists' judgments of acceptability are nevertheless used by native Standard English speakers, should not be interpreted by the criteria on which overtly codified grammar is interpreted. This is due to the differences between the principles and mechanisms of interactive, face-to-face discourse and written language. For example, while the basic dimension on which the contrast between deictic *this* and *that* is founded in English is spatial proximity/distance, in spoken discourse *this* and *that* are also used where the spatial meaning of *that* is irrelevant. Rather, in spontaneous discourse, for example *that* is used more often with the interpersonal and interactive functions of expressing speaker-involvement and of coordinating attention of the parties involved in conversation to points in the discourse where processing may be impeded. As a result, the spatial meanings of *this* and *that* may be weakening in Standard English. The problem that such findings have for Trudgill's characterization standardization of English as simply one from the extant varieties of English, unusual mainly due to the stability of its form, is that this criterion may be applied to spoken English much less so than to written usage and it must ignore register-based grammatical variation. If the social reality of language use in real-time interactions is one of inherent variability rather than stasis, the criterion of stability of form is inconsistent with Standard English being functionally elaborate.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to show that Standard English is both a natural cognitive and a socially constructed entity. It is constituted by a subset of distinctive properties from a remarkably rich set of linguistic resources

appropriate, mostly "the best authors," to serve as models of the codified Modern Standard English.

[21] Variability inherent to the grammars of individual speakers, which is controlled in some social contexts of use, has also been observed in private letters from the eighteenth century, including even the private letters of great prescriptivists like Robert Lowth and Samuel Johnson (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006). Biber et al. (1999) provide ample evidence for both quantitative and qualitative stylistic and register-based differences in contemporary English.

that the grammatical system of English affords its speakers, the range of which in itself demonstrates that English incorporates extensive variability. I-grammars are constructed in the minds of the speakers in linguistically and psychologically heterogeneous conditions in varying social contexts of interactions and for this reason they must be genetically designed to encompass variation in the environment. Language carries with it not only denotational, but also social, cultural and psychological meaning. No two individual minds are exactly alike and thus no individual mental grammars can ever be identical. However, as originally argued by Wilson and Henry (1998), a difference must be made between the ability of individual speakers to vary the norms and the actual production of variation. The former is allowed and at the same constrained by the bounds of the language faculty. The internal grammar of a child acquiring the first language may be different from the internal grammars of other speakers in his or her linguistic environment and further, the grammars internalized by two different speakers with the same social background may be different, but they still differ in highly restrictive ways. Actual production of variation is constrained by a range of factors related to production and processing of language in real time, including socially and culturally imposed norms. To take stability of form as a classificatory criterion, as Trudgill (1999, 2011) does, is to abstract away from the social reality of stylistic and register variation and the psychological and social role that variability has for negotiation and manipulation of power, status and stigma, construction of personal identity, etc. While idealizations may be necessary in linguistic theory, both generative and sociolinguistic, regardless their motivations, abstractions cannot explain the social reality of acquisition and use of language in real-time interactions.

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